



"I acknowledge the negative Effects, but Being on Social Media is Worth it to me": A Study on Self-control of Minors as Content Consumers on Social Networks

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Abstract. Social networks have been fully integrated into daily life. Minors, who are accessing social networks at increasingly younger ages, have become a priority audience, dedicating significant time to these platforms, where they actively consume content. This research aims to analyze how minors exercise ethical competence when using social networks—specifically, the dynamics that define their self-control are analyzed. To achieve this objective, a quantitative method has been applied. The technique used was a survey and the instrument used was a questionnaire designed to measure the dimension of self-control. The participating sample involved 582 minors from Peru, male and female, aged 12 to 17. The results show a high correlation between the variables that measure the absence and the presence of self-control, evidencing contradictions related to knowledge, emotions, and behavior of children. In sum, the results highlight the need to promote media literacy among children to facilitate development of more constructive relationships with the social media environment.

Keywords: Media Literacy, Self-Control, Consumers, Social Networks, Ethical Competence, Minors.

1 Introduction and Literature Review

Minors stand out as a key audience in the new digital communication environments, as they are active on the internet at an increasingly younger age [1]. In Peru, 72% of children aged 6-17 use the internet [2]. These minors participate in the dynamics of social networks as consumers and content creators [3].

Therefore, it is important to consider that social networks, through increasingly specialized algorithms, show content that captures the attention of users to guarantee the longest consumption time [4]. Considering that minors find it easy to use the tools provided by each platform, they end up being exposed to very diverse content in line with the interests they express in the digital environment [5].

In this scenario, it must be recalled that minors' intellectual formation and personality development is still in process. Hence, minors are considered to be vulnerable [6]. This approach becomes more relevant when the various risks to which minors are exposed on social networks are considered [7], [8], [9]. Among the main risks are psychological effects such as depression [10], stress [11], and anxiety [12]. Thus, there is an increasing need for media literacy with the potential to mediate deep and multidisciplinary knowledge of the media sphere and user behavior in the context of the digitization of social reality [13, p. 494].

Ever since the emergence of debates about the media's impact on audiences, the importance of media literacy in promoting a healthy and constructive relationship with these environments has been acknowledged [14]. The communication ecosystem has been enriched by digital technology and social networks. With its dizzying evolution, the need for media literacy focused on these environments is much more evident [15]. Navigating these environments responsibly requires personal skills that reflect a higher level of media competence [16].

In view of the new communication ecosystem, the specific field of social media literacy has become relevant for the training of minors [17]. Social networks, unlike traditional media, allow immediate and constant participation, which opens various possibilities for interaction. This has raised concerns about how this audience is dealing with an ecosystem that is developing rapidly and with little regulation [18]. "The permanent connectivity in which we find ourselves poses an unprecedented challenge to achieve effective ethics education among children and young people" [19, p. 17].

In this context, it is pertinent to examine in greater depth the competencies that minors mobilize when interacting on digital platforms, particularly those related to users' capacity for personal regulation. A key dimension in this process is self-control, typically characterized by the ability to inhibit impulses and override tempting stimuli [20]. In this sense, self-control can be understood as the process by which a person resolves a conflict between two competing goals; it involves the overcoming of impulses and is linked to situations in which there is a tension between immediate gratifications and long-term goals [21, p. 320]. Thus, it can be argued that there is low self-control when it yields to temporary and immediate satisfaction, generating an impact on integral well-being.

Self-control in the use of social networks is influenced by three factors: the possibilities offered by the medium, social factors and user traits [22]. Thus, to train minors in self-control, the characteristics of social networks must be taken into account to understand the dynamics they propose and their internal functioning, as well as users' social environment with the activities and tensions typical of the reference group, and users' intellectual and ethical preparation in relation to the habits they have developed.

Although children have developed skills to adapt to the technical mastery and interaction with social networks, self-control requires reflection and training designed to consider various dimensions, such as knowledge, emotion, and behavior [21]. Children are in a process of growth and transformation that creates the need to validate the personality they are building with the opinion of others, and social networks occupy an important place in this process [23].

This reality makes media literacy a necessary and urgent task, which becomes more relevant because the consumption of social networks is usually hyper-personalized, and content that may be inappropriate for minors circulates in this environment [24]. This research provides an explanation of a key dimension of this type of media literacy: self-control. The focus was chosen because self-control is crucial to reduce consumption time and steer minors to offline experiences that enrich their life project and help them in their personal maturation.

2 Materials and Methodology

The general research objective was to analyze how Peruvian minors aged 12-17 exercise ethical competence when using social networks. Specifically, the dynamics that define their self-control are analyzed, understood as a necessary skill to navigate an environment of several platforms and content available to the public. The following specific objectives can be deduced from this general goal:

SO1. To analyze the thinking of minors regarding social network content consumption.

SO2. To explore the actions of minors regarding social network content consumption.

SO3. To analyze the relationship between thoughts and actions as a manifestation of children's self-control regarding social network content consumption.

To achieve the research objectives, a quantitative methodology was used, specifically a survey. The research takes an observational approach, with the purpose of identifying correlations between the variables studied. The questionnaire used in the research included two blocks of questions, for a total of 16.

In the first block, sociodemographic and general information questions were included, pertaining to sex, age, place of residence, age when social media use started, the social networks used, and average daily time spent on social networks. In the second block, questions were included to inquire about the self-control of minors when consuming content on social networks. These questions focused on exploring the thoughts that minors experience during content consumption, as well as knowing the actions they take.

Table 1 presents the 10 questions related to self-control. These questions are based on studies by Conesa [19], Inzlicht et al. [21], Pilatti et al. [25], Zahrai et al. [20], and Reinecke et al. [22].

Table 1. Variables that measure self-control.

Question	Variable	Likert scale
Q7: In relation to what you experience when consuming social media, indicate your degree of disagreement or agreement with the following statements.	1. I don't know why I use social media so often.	1 = Strongly disagree
	2. I'm aware of the negative effects social media consumption has on my social and personal life.	2 = Disagree
	3. I think that most content is not really valuable.	3 = Neither agree nor disagree
	4. I often notice that when faced with boredom my first choice is to use social media.	4 = Agree
	5. I notice that I have more interest in watching content on social media than in doing offline activi-	5 = Strongly agree

	ties.	
Q8: In relation to your willingness to use social media, indicate your degree of disagreement or agreement with the following statements.	1. I have a defined schedule to use social media; outside of that schedule I dedicate myself to other activities.	1 = Strongly disagree
	2. I am aware of the moment when I want to use social media.	2 = Disagree
	3. I stop using social media when I want to.	3 = Neither agree nor disagree
	4. Sometimes I spend a lot of time on social media, but I don't know how to stop because it's so engaging.	4 = Agree
	5. I choose the content I want to see on social media.	5 = Strongly agree

The questionnaire was designed in digital format using the Survio platform, which also allowed for data collection. For its application, educational institutions in Peru’s Piura region were visited, where, with the support of school principals, meetings with parents were organized to explain the survey.

The questionnaire involved two stages. In the first, one parent read an informative document and provided informed consent to processing of the data. In addition, one parent indicated the sex, age and area of residence of the minor. The second stage involved informed consent by minors. Once this consent was granted, the minors answered questions about when they started using social networks, the platforms they use most, and time of daily dedication. Subsequently, the children could complete the 10 self-control questions.

Crucially, prior to data collection, participants were guaranteed the confidentiality of the information, they were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences, and they were provided with the contact of the principal investigator to resolve any doubts or concerns. At the end, the participants were thanked for their collaboration.

The research protocol was approved by the Institutional Committee of Research Ethics of University of Piura, with file No. CIEI.0047.01. This study has met all the required ethical conditions, and the fieldwork was carried out between January 27 and April 27, 2025.

The study targeted 4,232,412 urban Peruvian minors aged 12 to 17, as defined by public RENIEC records. A stratified random sample of 582 participants was drawn, considering sex and age strata, with a 95% confidence level, 4.06% margin of error, and assuming maximum variance ($p = q = .50$). Although all strata were covered, minor disproportions were detected in the final sample. To correct for this, post-stratification weighting was applied, ensuring unbiased estimators aligned with the population structure [26].

Finally, Table 2 presents the study's technical specifications. The items considered in the methodological design guarantee the reliability of this research.

Table 2. Technical overview of the methodological design.

1	Methodology	Quantitative
2	Technique	Survey
3	Instrument	Questionnaire
4	Population	Males and females aged 12-17 from urban Peru

5	Sample frame	RENIEC web registry
6	Population size	4,232,412 people
7	Sampling procedure	Stratified random sampling with proportional affixation
8	Sample	582 units of analysis
9	Level of confidence	95%
10	Margin of error	4.06%
11	Analysis variables	V1. Thought processes associated with the consumption of content by minors on social networks. V2. Attitudinal disposition toward the consumption of content by minors on social networks.
12	Instrument reliability	Alpha Cronbach: .753 Number of items: 10

As presented in Table 2, item 11, the study includes the dimension of self-control, which has a construct represented by questions P7 and P8, each with five items that follow a Likert scale. With the construct, the following analysis variables were measured:

V1. Thought processes associated with the consumption of content by minors on social networks.

V2. Attitudinal disposition toward the consumption of content by minors on social networks.

Item 12 details the statistics to measure reliability in the self-control dimension. The number of items corresponds to the items in each question. The reliability value is within the appropriate range of 0.7 to 0.9, which ensures that the construct is adequately measuring the dimension under study.

3 Results Analysis

A priori statistical power analysis was performed, using G*Power software to determine the sample size needed in a bivariate correlation analysis (normal model). Mean effect size $r = 0.3$, significance level $\alpha = 0.05$, and statistical power of 95% were established. The results indicated that a minimum sample of 138 participants was required to guarantee the detection of the expected effect, reaching a real statistical power of 0.954, which ensures low probability of type II errors. The final sample involved 582 participants, significantly more than the recommended minimum size.

Table 3 presents Spearman correlations between questions 7 and 8 that are part of the self-control construct.

Table 3. Spearman correlation matrix of the self-control dimension.

Spearman's Rho		Q7_1	Q7_2	Q7_3	Q7_4	Q7_5	Q8_1	Q8_2	Q8_3	Q8_4
Q7_2	rs	.348**								
	p	<.001								

Q7_3	rs	.291**	.448**						
	p	<.001	<.001						
Q7_4	rs	.381**	.323**	.340**					
	p	<.001	<.001	<.001					
Q7_5	rs	.319**	.186**	.186**	.493**				
	p	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001				
Q8_1	rs	-0.038	.153**	.144**	-0.057	-.142**			
	p	0.352	<.001	<.001	0.159	<.001			
Q8_2	rs	-0.024	.267**	.262**	0.048	-0.045	.340**		
	p	0.559	<.001	<.001	0.235	0.264	<.001		
Q8_3	rs	0.055	.164**	.152**	.193**	0.077	.134**	.491**	
	p	0.179	<.001	<.001	<.001	0.059	<.001	<.001	
Q8_4	rs	.350**	.220**	.124**	.346**	.433**	-.093*	-0.032	0.076
	p	<.001	<.001	0.002	<.001	<.001	0.022	0.436	0.062
Q8_5	rs	.122**	.264**	.286**	.300**	.090*	.093*	.399**	.484**
	p	0.003	<.001	<.001	<.001	0.026	0.022	<.001	<.001

** The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral).

* The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (bilateral).

Source: Statistical analysis obtained from SPSS.

As shown in Table 3, an analysis of Spearman correlations was performed of the items belonging to the construct comprising questions Q7 and Q8 of the instrument, which in turn belong to the self-control dimension. The results show statistically significant associations between multiple items. Correlations that highlight a coincidence component of self-control have not been analyzed, on the contrary, attention was paid to the highly significant correlations that reveal novel, and even apparently contradictory, dynamics in the exercise of self-control by minors. An analysis of these correlations is presented below.

A positive and significant correlation was identified between the item "I don't know why I use social media so often" (Q7_1) and the item "I often notice that when faced with boredom my first choice is to use social media" (Q7_4), with a Spearman coefficient of $\rho = .381$ and significance value $p < .001$. This result suggests that the more frequent the habitual use of social networks, with no specific reason, the tendency to resort to these platforms as a response to boredom increases.

Likewise, a positive and significant correlation was identified between the item "I don't know why I use social media so often" (Q7_1) and the item "I notice that I have more interest in watching content on social media than in doing offline activities" (Q7_5), with a Spearman coefficient of $\rho = .319$ and significance value $p < .001$. This result suggests that the greater the frequency of habitual use of social networks, the

greater the interest in the consumption of digital content to the detriment of experiences in the physical world, engaging with peers or the social circle.

A positive and significant correlation was identified between the item "I don't know why I use social media so often" (Q7_1) and the item "Sometimes I spend a lot of time on social media, but I don't know how to stop because it's so engaging" (Q8_4), with a Spearman coefficient of $\rho = .350$ and a significance value $p < .001$. This result suggests that minors who report frequent and unreflective use of social networks also tend to experience difficulties in regulating their time of use, motivated by the high attraction of digital content.

In addition, a positive and significant correlation was identified between the item "I'm aware of the negative effects social media consumption has on my social and personal life" (Q7_2) and the item "I often notice that when faced with boredom my first choice is to use social media" (Q7_4), with a Spearman coefficient of $\rho = .323$ and significance value $p < .001$. This result suggests that, although children are aware of the negative effects of social media use in their personal and social lives, they still tend to turn to these platforms as an immediate response to boredom.

Likewise, a positive and significant correlation was identified between the item "I'm aware of the negative effects social media consumption has on my social and personal life" (Q7_2) and the item "Sometimes I spend a lot of time on social media, but I don't know how to stop because it's so engaging" (Q8_4), with a Spearman coefficient of $\rho = .220$ and significance value $p < .001$. This result suggests that children who recognize the harmful consequences linked to social media use also tend to experience difficulties in controlling the time they spend on these platforms, due to their high capacity for engagement.

Additionally, a positive and significant correlation was identified between the item "I think that most content is not really valuable" (Q7_3) and the item "I often notice that when faced with boredom my first choice is to use social media" (Q7_4), with a Spearman coefficient of $\rho = .340$ and significance value $p < .001$. This result suggests that, although children consider content on social networks to be worthless, they tend to turn to these platforms as a habitual response to boredom.

A positive and significant correlation was identified between the item "I notice that I have more interest in watching content on social media than in doing offline activities" (Q7_5) and the item "Sometimes I spend a lot of time on social media, but I don't know how to stop because it's so engaging" (Q8_4), with a Spearman coefficient of $\rho = .433$ and significance value $p < .001$. This result suggests that children recognize their interest in social media is detrimental to offline activities, and as this awareness rises, their appreciation of the time they spend on social networks increases, without the ability to stop because the content is attractive.

4 Reflections and Conclusions

The correlations presented above indicate a dissonance between the thinking of minors about their use of social networks and the patterns of behavior they show on these platforms.

Meaningful correlations can be translated into three key ideas:

1. The results suggest a pattern of impulsive or unreflective use of social networks by minors, associated with emotional escape mechanisms, automated habits, and the search for immediate gratification. This type of consumption does not always seem to be motivated by a conscious need, but rather by stimuli that are difficult to control.

2. Although children recognize the negative effects of their consumption, they tend to turn to social networks as the main way to cope with emotions such as boredom. This behavior is also associated with a progressive shift of interest toward digital environments, to the detriment of offline experiences, evidencing a possible disconnection from face-to-face or physical activities.

3. Despite acknowledging the low quality of content, there is still difficulty in exercising control over the time and attention devoted to social networks. This contradiction could be explained by the strong attraction exerted by the platforms, driven by their accessibility, persuasive design, delivery of content that is of interest to minors and the possibility of escaping reality.

These key ideas, extracted from the results of the research, show that minors find social networks do not add to their life project, and even detail a series of ideas about the necessary limits for the consumption of social networks. But when assessing statements about their behavior, it is evident that they are not capable of exercising self-control related to consumption, but that social networks encourage them to stay engaged constantly, without knowing how to stop and without further ethical reflection. This highlights the strength of the gratifications generated by social networks, linked to the very configuration and dynamics of the medium and to social factors [22].

The results highlight the need to improve media literacy of minors, as work must focus on the dimension of self-control and the exercise of prudence. "Prudence puts a brake on the excessive and impertinent curiosity that wants to 'prove' everything that 'can' be done, to the extent that not everything that can be done must be done, if its consequences are unknown or too uncertain" [27, p. 47]. This is much more necessary for minors who also find in social networks an environment of validation or a group to which they belong [23].

Thus, ethical competence training, specifically in the dimension of self-control, must encompass intellectual training to understand social network dynamics and be able to deploy mechanisms that limit their ability to attract people's attention. Habits of generating strength in action that limits the impulse to constantly use social networks should be formed. "Ethical reflection in the digital age needs to consider the ways of thinking and lifestyles mediated by the constant use of the internet and social networks" [19, p. 17]. This is a complex task that exceeds the strict field of knowledge and involves synergistic work between the fields of communication and education, to strengthen resources and personal tools for minors to exercise self-control in their relationship with social network environments.

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